



United States
Department of
Agriculture

**Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service**



WYOMING WILDLIFE SERVICES

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Wyoming

Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Wyoming Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

A significant part of Wyoming WS' role is protecting domestic livestock from predators such as coyotes, red fox, mountain lions, black bears, and sensitive species such as grizzly bears and wolves. The expertise of WS' Specialists allows proper identification of the cause of the damage to livestock and a professional response that minimizes impacts on wildlife. Wyoming WS is at the forefront of an effort to protect human health and safety from an outbreak of skunk rabies in east-central Wyoming. WS also works in cooperation with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) in a disease monitoring project to protect endangered black-footed ferrets. WS works with a variety of cooperators including airports, businesses, cities, counties and individuals in both urban and rural settings to curtail or prevent damage to various resources by a variety of wildlife species.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

In many instances, WS enables others to resolve wildlife conflicts through *technical assistance* by providing information or equipment. However, when resolving these conflicts is beyond the means of the individual, WS conducts *direct assistance* regarding wildlife at the damage site. WS also conducts *scientific research* across the nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure that WS operations employ state-of-the-art science and technology.

Protecting Livestock from Predators—Gross farm income in Wyoming annually approaches or exceeds \$1 billion. Wyoming ranks eighth nationally in total land in farms and ranches and first in average size of farms and ranches. The cattle industry in the state accounts for about 70% of all agricultural cash receipts, while Wyoming ranks third in the nation in production of stock sheep and second in wool production.

Wildlife Services works with the cattle and sheep industries to protect livestock from predators. Wyoming Agriculture Statistics Service reported that in 2000, Wyoming sheep producers lost 87,000 head of sheep and lambs to all causes, and 48,000 (55%) were lost to predators at a value of \$2.62 million. Stockgrowers also lose significant numbers of new calves and some cows to predators. Wyoming produced 830,000 calves in 2000. The value of calves lost due to predation is estimated to be greater than \$3 million. WS, in cooperation with the Wyoming Department of Agriculture, WGFD, County Predatory Animal Boards, and the Animal Damage Management Board, provide both technical and in-field assistance to reduce losses. An increasing population of bears and mountain lions, and their subsequent dispersal into new areas, has resulted in an increasing number of livestock depredations. In June 1999, an agreement was signed between WS and WGFD delegating responsibility to WS for responding to black bear, grizzly bear, and mountain lion livestock depredation complaints in a four-county area. This program has worked so well that the program was expanded in July 2000 and will be statewide in July 2001. Research has shown that without a professional,

Major Assistance Activities:

Livestock protection

Participation on the Animal Damage Management Board (ADMB)
Deer and antelope predation research projects in cooperation with
ADMB

Control of skunk rabies in north-central Wyoming

Black-footed ferret disease monitoring

Trophy big game (black bear, cougar) depredation management
with WGFD

Grizzly bear depredation management with WGFD

Wolf depredation management with FWS

Aircraft/wildlife strike prevention

Urban wildlife assistance

Eagle depredation assistance

Pigeon population management at Basin Electric Power
Cooperative

Pigeon, starling, and vulture roost control and management
Technical assistance

accountable wildlife damage management program in place, livestock losses could be 2 to 3 times greater than they are at present.

The general strategy is to separate coyotes and sheep, using an integrated approach utilizing both non-lethal methods and removal of damaging predators. An analysis of producers' operations reported that 100% of Wyoming livestock producers who cooperate with WS use non-lethal control techniques in the management of their livestock. This reduces predator losses while minimizing the amount of lethal control necessary. While producer-employed non-lethal strategies vary, some producers utilize as many as 18 separate non-lethal techniques during the year. When damage occurs in these cases, lethal methods are used since non-lethal techniques have lost effectiveness.

Rabies—Skunk rabies is a growing concern in eastern and central Wyoming and is currently spreading to the southern and western portions of the state. Statewide there have been numerous cases of human exposure. In 2000, there were 76 positive cases of rabies, primarily in skunks. Campbell County, the City of Gillette, and Weston County have partnered with WS to provide a rabies prevention program, and other counties are considering similar programs. WS' Specialists respond to complaints from the public, local law enforcement, and city or county animal control personnel regarding skunks or other animals that are noticeably sick. Skunks are live-trapped and removed from designated areas and specimens are collected for laboratory testing. The results of the current program in Campbell County show that the number of confirmed rabies incidents have dropped from 27 in fiscal year 1997, to 10 during fiscal year 1998, 6 during fiscal year 1999, and 11 in fiscal year 2000.

Protecting Threatened and Endangered Species—Wyoming's Shirley Basin is one of four active black-footed ferret release sites, and the only one where a population has been maintained without being augmented since 1994. WS assists the WGFD by twice annually collecting coyotes to monitor for diseases that may impact ferrets.

The experimental population of wolves in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem has shown an eight-fold increase since their reintroduction in 1995. In the past year, the wolf population in Wyoming has expanded from 118 to 169 animals. WS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) work cooperatively to solve wolf depredation complaints. WS removes individual wolves or packs at the direction of FWS when predation occurs. During the past year, 6 head of cattle, 39 sheep, and 8 dogs were killed by wolves. In response, 13 wolves were either relocated or removed. The efficient and professional management of problem wolves builds public support for wolf presence and promotes conservation of all wolves.

WS Research Relevant to Wyoming:

Developing chemistry-based tools for wildlife damage management

Focusing on adult territorial coyotes to manage sheep depredation

Inducing infertility as a wildlife management tool

Managing coyote predation through reproductive intervention strategies

Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock and wildlife

Remaining Challenges Create Unmet Needs

Skunk rabies appears to be spreading westward across the state of Wyoming. WS is receiving increased requests for assistance from counties that are just beginning to experience problems with this disease. Additional resources will be needed to cooperate with these counties in developing and operating rabies control programs. The development of an oral vaccine and delivery system for skunks should be explored as such technology would be extremely useful in containing this disease.

Expanding populations of wolves and grizzly bears will result in more damage to livestock, property, and human health and safety as well as increased conflicts with traditional methods currently used to manage coyote predation on livestock. In addition to needing new techniques to deal with predator damage, the use of helicopters for selective management of predators in high elevation livestock ranges will be required.

Funding

WS operates a cooperatively funded program with Federally allocated USDA funds and personnel, supplemented by additional funds and personnel provided by a variety of cooperators such as producers, agencies, individuals, etc., who are experiencing or have an interest in wildlife damage management.

